

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-1, 22

THE WASHINGTON POST
25 June 1978

Double Reverse: Chronicle of U.S. Policy on Africa

This article was written by Washington Post staff writer Don Oberdorfer on the basis of his reporting and that of staff writers Robert G. Kaiser and Walter Pincus.

On May 4, in the anteroom of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Central Intelligence Agency Director Stansfield Turner showed Sen. Dick Clark (D-Iowa) a written plan for secretly supplying U.S. arms, through France, to guerrilla forces fighting against the government of Angola. The plan, according to Turner, was under discussion in the National Security Council, the highest foreign-policy-making body of the U.S. government.

In Paris on June 14, six weeks later, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance approved a diametrically opposite plan for dealing with Angola. After White House clearance and discussions with European allies, Vance authorized a senior American diplomat to visit the Angolan capital of Luanda to improve lines of communication and cooperation with that Soviet- and Cuban-backed government.

The Turner plan to destabilize the Angolan regime and thus "tie down" some of the estimated 20,000 Cuban troops there was sponsored by presidential national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, according to authoritative sources. It is not being implemented, due to the opposition of Clark and to legislative restrictions previously sponsored by him on U.S. involvement in the Angolan civil war.

The Vance plan to work with the Angolan regime through open diplomatic means is the one that is being implemented. This weekend U.S. Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations

Donald McHenry is in Luanda for talks with President Agostinho Neto.

The two programs of action in Angola—and the results—capture in summary and symbolic form a Washington policy struggle of the past two months centered on Africa. By common judgment in the foreign affairs community, Brzezinski has lost and Vance has won. But there is no consensus on the nature or details of the contest between divergent tendencies within the government, or on the significance of the outcome.

The lodestar of policy toward Africa from the earliest days of the Carter presidency has been emphasis on diplomatic and economic efforts to deal with African problems in their African context and deemphasis on East-West confrontations.

Beginning in early May the rhetoric, some of the planning and much of the implied future direction shifted almost 180 degrees toward a hard anti-communist position. When this approach generated public apprehension and the determined opposition of some of Carter's closest Capitol Hill allies, the policy orientation swung back again nearly to its original point.

"The period was an aberration," said a senior State Department official involved in the era of uncertainty. "The rhetoric changed and then changed back again, but implementation of policy remained pretty much the same," said another State Department man.

According to another administration insider with a good view of the goings-on, "We just had a swing of the pendulum. It swung so far that it struck Jimmy Carter in the side of the head."

Still another inside commentary on the events: "As we were moving along this thoughtful path we were getting goosed by the Russkis and the Cubes—that's what Brzezinski calls 'em—all the time. So we had to go over to the side of the road for a little fisticuffs. But now we're back on the path."

Among the factors that contributed to the swing toward a harder anticommunist policy in Africa were the increasing activity of the Soviet-Cuban military combination, especially the swift buildup in Ethiopia; the apprehensions of U.S. allies, particularly the French, Iranians and Saudi Arabians about the specter of spreading communist influence; the May 12-13 invasion by exile soldiers living in Angola across the border into Zaire's rich Shaba Province; the sharply declining domestic political fortunes of President Carter, as measured in public opinion polls, and the frustration of Brzezinski, former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and other strategically minded policy operatives at the seeming impotence of the United States against a new sort of overseas challenge.

Contributing to the return of the pendulum toward what Vance calls a "positive" and "affirmative" U.S. policy in Africa:

- The formidable legislative and political barriers to the use of U.S. arms or military might on the continent.

- Strong misgivings of conservatives as well as liberals in Congress and public life about becoming involved in "another Vietnam" in

African states, including a public lecture through the assembled diplomatic corps and three confidential messages to Carter from Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, one of the most influential of the African continent's leaders:

- The practical difficulties of working through the corrupt and often ineffective government of Zaire.

- Three messages, including a private letter expressing an interest in improved relations, from Angolan President Neto.

Perhaps the most important single consideration, according to several observers of the policy process, was that in the absence of covert operations in Africa or credible strategic threats against the Soviet Union and Cuba, there was no feasible way to back up anticommunist rhetoric with deeds which could deal effectively with the problem.

On the other hand, the proponents of the "Africanist" policy of forbearance and negotiations came up with a practical program of political initiatives to suggest.

This set of facts is the reality behind the current State Department refrain that, whatever the rhetoric, the implementation of African policy has been consistent throughout the Carter administration.

Because the crucial decision-making took place at the highest level of the U.S. government and Vance has issued orders that there is to be no "pounding the chest" about what happened, it is not known whether there was ever a head-to-head showdown between Vance and Brzezinski. Subordinates say that there was not, despite unconfirmed reports to the contrary.

His assistants report that the usually ebullient Brzezinski, whose sharp-tongued public attacks on the Soviets made newspaper headlines and magazine covers earlier this month, has become muted and unusually retiring. In a White House briefing for 75 members of Congress last Tuesday night, "the hard liner," as Carter referred to him with a grin, took a deferential role and limited his remarks to his recent trip to China.

Vance, on the other hand, could only shrug his shoulders helplessly when queried about the covert action explorations in early May and, in apparent frustration, privately applauded British Prime Minister James Callaghan's caustic remark in early June that a number of amateurish "Christopher Columboes" in the United States are discovering Africa for the first time.

Now the usually retiring secretary of state has captured the limelight, and, early last week, in public speech and the private White House briefing,